

A Choice to Live

A pivotal time in my walk with Christ was the week that followed my mother's death. Up until this time, God had been planting and watering seeds in my spiritual life. Charlie and I were married in September of 1989. Our first child, Chelsea, was born in April of 1992. I became a believing Christian somewhere in between those two milestones. I had faced many obstacles in my life prior to this time, mostly due to living in a very dysfunctional family. My family drama caused me to have an extremely low self-esteem, with many personal and emotional scars. Since I had become a Christian, my outlook on life had improved greatly, and I was blessed beyond measure. I thought I had conquered those old demons that shamed me for so long.

The last day I spent with my mother was April 11, 1994. She was in the hospital again, undergoing more tests for her heart and trying new medications, as the others she had been taking were making her sick and weak. Mom was a heavy smoker and was extremely overweight. She was also very depressed, and had been for most of her life. Her lifestyle had finally taken its' toll. I believe there are times when God will cause us to be flat on our backs, in order to make us look up.

During my last visit with her, Mom was sitting up in her hospital bed, talking non-stop and full of energy. We talked about Chelsea, who would be celebrating her second birthday in two days. We talked about my baby-on-the-way, Samuel, due in August. I was completely surprised when she said, "I believe God is giving me a second chance at life. I believe He sent me to these doctors and they're going to take care of me." Her statement was so out of character, but the sincerity in her voice gave me hope for happier days. She and I talked more about God, and what the bible says about those who will be in heaven, and those who won't. I always prayed my mom would seek help from God, especially now. I was thankful that she allowed herself to be placed in His care. I could only pray she would remember what she said after she was better, and out of the hospital.

We were truly enjoying our visit when it felt as if a dark shadow had entered the room, and my mother's mood changed. She grew uncomfortable with our conversation, and in her usual matter-of-fact way, she ended it. Curtly, she said, "I'm tired now. I want to change clothes." I was taken back, hurt, and frustrated. I said "Good night", without giving her my usual hug before leaving. My eyes were stinging and my throat ached as I left the room and walked down the empty corridor. I got into the car and cried. I was crying at the thought of losing her, sobbing at the thought of her living in such misery. Selfishly, I knew I was crying because again, she was making me miserable. I spoke out loud, "God, if she isn't going to change after she gets better, then please, just take her now."

The next day, around 2 p.m., my sister called to tell me our mother was gone. “No! No! No!” was all I could cry out. I remembered what I had asked of God the night before, and was overwhelmed with guilt. When Charlie picked me up to go to the hospital, I told him what I had prayed. He said “Then God knew she wouldn’t have changed.” My sister was at the hospital. She had been crying, as I had, and we sobbed again when we saw each other.

We were told earlier that morning mom’s blood pressure had fallen dangerously low. After various attempts, they could not bring it back up, and her heart eventually stopped. She died around noon. Mom had given her home phone number in case of an emergency, so with Susie and me both being at work, the hospital couldn’t reach us. I hate that she was alone for those last hours.

As everyone who loses a loved one unexpectedly knows, the days that follow are like a whirlwind. One puts off mourning until all arrangements and decisions are made. It was mom’s wish to be cremated. We held a memorial service for her at my and Charlie’s church. All four of her children, and all of her grandchildren were present. Through it all, my sister and I marveled at how the moment we learned of her passing, all of the anger and bitterness we had felt toward our mother had vanished. It’s hard to admit, but there was also a tremendous relief.

My mother was only fifty-seven when she died. I don’t know why God decided to take mom when He did, but I will always remember our conversation and my prayer the night before she died. I can only hope that when she knew she wasn’t going to make it, she remembered God, and called on Him. Sometimes that last moment is all we have, and it will be a decision of everlasting fate.

Later, the evening of the memorial service, the four of us decided to go through mom’s picture box, to choose the photos each of us wanted to keep. At first we were laughing and remembering the stories from the photographs. I’m the one that started the war. I found an eighth-grade school picture of me, from the worst time in my life. In my hormonal and pregnant state, I ripped the hated picture in half. My brother Mike exploded and yelled, “Why did you do that?!” The next moments were a blur. Angry words starting flying between all four of us. I was hysterical, and in complete disbelief that this was even happening. Susie stood on a chair pounding her fists on her thighs, yelling “Stop It! Stop It!” She was crying hysterically too, shouting at the same time. Our mother just died, and now here we were screaming and yelling at each other. It was like taking a trip back in time to when I was younger, and I was moving in slow motion.

Charlie yelled, “Lisa, It’s time to go home!” He was carrying Chelsea as he went out the front door toward the car. I stood there on the front porch, frozen. I looked to my left, and saw my new family, my husband and my little girl, going ‘away’ from this freak show. Then I looked to my right, back into the past, into a house where people were

still screaming and yelling at one another. It was surreal, and I felt like I was standing in cement and couldn't move. Suddenly, I remembered the little person growing inside of me, so I walked toward our car. I walked toward love, peace and a new and full life with God. I walked away from tears, and pain, and hurting. No more. I was finished with that life once and for all. I shed many tears during the ride home, but I knew everything would be okay.

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